

# FORT GANSEVOORT

## Los Angeles Times

Essential Arts: The most unforgettable cultural events of 2019 and art as protest

By CAROLINA A. MIRANDA

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It's year-in-review season! I'm Carolina A. Miranda, staff writer at the Los Angeles Times, with what was good and what was not in 2019.

Parsing the year

What a doozy!

Times classical music critic Mark Swed notes that the story of the decade has been the "stellar rise of the Los Angeles Philharmonic." He also runs through a list of highs and lows, including composer Ellen Reid's Pulitzer win and Plácido Domingo's inglorious exit from L.A. Opera.

Gustavo Dudamel, right, takes a bow with Zubin Mehta, center, and Esa-Pekka Salonen at the L.A. Phil's gala concert in October.

(Francine Orr / Los Angeles Times)

Art critic Christopher Knight lists his favorite shows (and runners-up) for the year, including conceptualist Allen Ruppersberg's solo turn at the Hammer Museum and the San Diego Museum of Art's "marvelous introduction" to 17th century religious and secular art from the Spanish empire.

On Knight's list was L.A. painter's Lari Pittman's "staggering display" at the Hammer. I wrote a little year-end paean to the artist who likes to embrace the more-is-more school of painting. "I can see how minimalism came out of Calvinism," he told me.

Theater critic Charles McNulty takes us on a tour of the theatrical highlights, which includes the Old Globe Theatre's production of "Almost Famous," channeling "the freewheeling spirit of 1970s rock," and Heidi Schreck's "What the Constitution Means to Me," the "most surprising success of Broadway's spring season.

Heidi Schreck in the unlikely Broadway hit "What the Constitution Means to Me."

(Joan Marcus)

Plus, Chris Barton rounds up the best jazz albums of the year. And a gaggle of cultural figures — including writer Susan Orlean and novelist Laila Lalami — talk about the books they couldn't put down in 2019.

You can find all the year-end coverage, including year-enders on film, television, music and video games, at this link.

Painting protest

A painting of Emiliano Zapata that recently went on view at the Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City has led to violent (and homophobic) protests over his depiction: nude and wearing high heels. The work, by Fabián Cháirez, examines issues related to representations of gender and sexuality in a culture dominated by machismo, reports Times Mexico City correspondent Kate Linthicum.

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People view a painting by Fabián Cháirez showing Mexican revolutionary hero Emiliano Zapata in high heels and a pink sombrero.

(Eduardo Verdugo / Associated Press)

A viral anthem

I report on how [the protest-performance](#) by the Chilean collective Lastesis, titled “A Rapist in Your Path,” became a viral phenomenon and the feminist anthem for 2019: “It doesn’t simply call for an end to violence against women, it calls out the state infrastructures that belittle sexual assaults.” Last weekend, a group of more than 200 women performed it at LACMA.

on the New Yorker Radio Hour.

Carmen Mardonez, center, and a group of women perform Lastesis’ “A Rapist in Your Path” at LACMA.

(Gary Coronado / Los Angeles Times)

Design time

In August, officials at the La Brea Tar Pits had settled on a short list of three architectural proposals to revamp the tar pits park — including one scheme that would have exiled the iconic fiberglass mammoths to a museum exhibition case. This week, we learned that the New York studio Weiss/Manfredi was chosen to remake the museum and park. [The winning proposal](#), as I wrote on Wednesday, “clarified the park’s many functions, preserved the ’70s-era George C. Page Museum, added a new exhibition wing and expanded the lawn area. And not insignificantly: It kept L.A.’s most famous proboscideans right where they’ve always been.”

A rendering shows a proposed redesign of the La Brea Tar Pits by Weiss/Manfredi.

(Weiss/Manfredi)

Plus, contributor David L. Ulin writes on what L.A.’s [street light design competition](#) can do for city thoroughfares. It can be “a reclamation project,” he writes, “a means of reestablishing our connection to the street.”

Everything dance

There’s [a new 3-D doc](#) about the life and career of Merce Cunningham, the avant-garde choreographer known for divorcing dance performances from sound. “Cunningham,” writes Times film critic Kenneth Turan, is “a visual wonder that involves from start to finish.”

The Times’ Makeda Easter goes [behind the scenes](#) to look at how the doc re-created some of Cunningham’s most famous dances, including “RainForest,” from 1968, which featured dancers performing in a room full of Mylar balloons designed by Andy Warhol.

A still from a re-creation of Merce Cunningham’s 1968 dance “RainForest” in the 3-D film “Cunningham.”

(The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts)

Classical notes

Mark Swed headed to Palo Alto to check out the U.S. premiere of “Hell’s Fury, the Hollywood Songbook.” It’s a 1940s work that [feels strikingly relevant today](#): “Hanns Eisler’s songs, written during Hollywood’s supposed golden age, most with texts by Bertolt Brecht, do an excellent job of encapsulating the vision of a newly

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capitalized silicon-age Hollywood.”

Baritone Russell Braun performs in the U.S. premiere of “Hell’s Fury, the Hollywood Songbook” at Stanford University.

(Michael Spencer for Stanford Live)

Swed also writes about the L.A. Phil’s tribute to British composer Oliver Knussen, who since his death has been “taking on the stature of a legend.” The tributes, he writes, “contained but 40 minutes of music, but they said a lot.”

On the stage

“A new ice age is upon us,” writes Margaret Gray, about the omnipresence of the film “Frozen,” including “Frozen 2” in cinemas, a namesake musical on Broadway and a North American tour that just landed at the Hollywood Pantages. The tour, she writes, “is irresistible in its creativity and verve, seeking and often discovering the right balance between re-creation and innovation.”

Caroline Bowman is Elsa in the “Frozen” musical North American tour, now at the Hollywood Pantages.

(Deen van Meer)

Gray also sits down for a Q&A with Rex Smith, the musician who stars in “Love Actually Live,” a stage production at the Wallis that was inspired by the film of the same name. He plays the role of Billy Mack, an old rocker who is staging a comeback (played in the film by Bill Nighy). Says Smith of the role: “Bill Nighy’s an actor playing an aging rock star; I’m an aging rock star playing an actor.”

At the Lounge Theatre in Hollywood, F. Kathleen Foley reviews “Salvage,” Tim Alderson’s “play with music.” “If you’re a fan of country music — the alcohol-fueled kind that drips with 100-proof regret — then you’ll probably take a liking to ‘Salvage,’” she writes.

Makeda Easter talks to singer Michelle Williams, formerly of Destiny’s Child, about how much she appreciated her anonymous turn in TV’s “The Masked Singer” and her imminent appearance in “A Snow White Christmas.” “I just love doing theater,” Williams says. “It keeps my chops going.”

Singer Michelle Williams is appearing in “A Snow White Christmas” at the Pasadena Civic Auditorium.  
(Mel Melcon / Los Angeles Times)

Ready for the weekend

My weekly Datebook of artsy fartsy happenings came back to roaring life this week with a show by Christopher Myers at the new East Hollywood art space Fort Gansevoort.

Matt Cooper rounds up what’s doing this coming week in art museum and galleries, classical music, dance and theater and has the list of the 7 best things to do in L.A., which include a showcase of “The Nutcracker” with Misty Copeland.

Misty Copeland in the American Ballet Theatre production of “The Nutcracker.”  
(Doug Gifford)

In other news

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- Peter Maass has a good essay on the controversial Nobel Prize for Literature that was awarded to Peter Handke, an Austrian author who has denied Serb atrocities against Muslims during the 1990s.
- The Mark Taper Forum has announced it will offer a limited number of \$15 student rush tickets for “What the Constitution Means to Me.”
- The UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television has received a \$10 million commitment to renovate the Ralph Freud Playhouse.
- Plus, UCLA’s art department just got its first endowed chair — to be held by Catherine Opie.
- And because too much UCLA is not enough, art department chair Andrea Fraser gets the profile treatment in the New York Times Style Magazine. Great read.
- Frieze L.A. director Bettina Korek is heading to London to take the top spot at the Serpentine Gallery.
- LACMA has secured a “critical” City Council vote needed to bridge Wilshire Boulevard with its new building.
- Anna Wiener reports on San Francisco’s Salesforce Park: “Taxpayer-funded, corporately branded, suspended above the homeless, the park is an irresistible metaphor for the city’s socioeconomic tensions.”
- And Mark Lamster has a look at David Adjaye’s latest in San Antonio: The Ruby City art center that was literally born of a patron’s dream.
- KCRW’s Frances Anderton has a great piece on the life and work of SCI-Arc founder Ray Kappe, who died last month.

And last but not least...

There has been a lot of banana art commentary happening in the news. Curator Stuart Comer wins.